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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

November 04, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 4859 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: CVIS, CMGT, KPAO
Captions: None
Subject: UAE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION OFFICIALS WARMLY
WELCOME REDUCTIONS TO VISA PROCESSING DELAYS
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 04859

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: PAO
INFO: CONS AMB DCM
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ACTION: PAO
INFO: CONS

DISSEMINATION: PAO
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:RALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: CON:TPONCE
CLEARED: PAO:HOLSIN-WINDECKER; CON:LMITCHELL

VZCZCADI354
RR RUEHDI RUEHC RUEHXK
DE RUEHAD #4859 3080833
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 040833Z NOV 03
FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHDI/AMCONSUL DUBAI 3513
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2296
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 004859

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/PPD; NEA/ARP; NEA/FO; ECA; IIP/G/NESA;
CA/EX; CA/FO; CA/VO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION OFFICIALS WARMLY
WELCOME REDUCTIONS TO VISA PROCESSING DELAYS

1. SUMMARY: ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2003, ABU DHABI CONOFF
AND EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR VISITED THE SCHOLARSHIP OFFICE AT THE
UAE MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (MOHE). DURING THIS MEETING,
CONOFF ADDRESSED THE CURRENT COMPLICATIONS FACING UAE
STUDENTS, INCLUDING VISA PROCESSING DELAYS AND NATIONAL
SECURITY ENTRY AND EXIT REGISTRATION SYSTEM (NSEERS)
PROCEDURES, BUT BROUGHT WORD OF CHANGES AND IMPROVEMENTS TO
BOTH. WHILE OUR INTERLOCUTORS RAISED SEVERAL COMPLAINTS,
THESE UAEG OFFICIALS WERE DELIGHTED TO HEAR THE "GOOD NEWS"
AND NOTED SUCH CHANGES WILL ENCOURAGE UAE NATIONALS TO RETURN

TO THE US. END SUMMARY.

12. AS PART OF THE EMBASSY'S ONGOING OUTREACH PROGRAM, VICE CONSUL AND FSN EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR MET WITH MOHE SCHOLARSHIP DIRECTOR NAJAT MAHMOUD AND HER STAFF. AT THE ONSET OF THE MEETING, NAJAT AND HER STAFF RAISED THE ISSUE OF US VISA PROCESSING AND NSEERS PROCEDURES. WELL-QUALIFIED UAE STUDENTS OFTEN WAIT MORE THAN TWO MONTHS TO RECEIVE A VISA, WITH MOST MISSING A SEMESTER OR TWO. NAJAT NOTED THAT OTHER STUDENTS AND PARENTS HEAR THESE STORIES AND INSTEAD CHOOSE THE UK, CANADA, OR AUSTRALIA, FOR WHICH THERE ARE NO VISA DELAYS. FURTHER COMPLICATING MATTERS ARE THE NSEERS PROCEDURES. MOST US POES DO NOT CLEARLY INDICATE WHERE STUDENTS MUST REGISTER, AND STUDENTS ARE OFTEN DIRECTED TO ANOTHER OFFICE OUTSIDE OF THE AIRPORT, RESULTING IN FURTHER CONFUSION FOR THE STUDENTS. OVERALL, APPLICATIONS FOR STUDY IN THE US REMAIN VERY LOW, DESPITE THE MOHE'S BEST EFFORTS TO RECRUIT STUDENTS TO THE US.

13. IN RESPONSE, CONOFF EXPLAINED THAT THE VISA PROCESSING REQUIREMENTS WERE RECENTLY REFOCUSED AND NARROWED, AND WE HAVE IMPROVED THEIR IMPLEMENTATION. IN PARTICULAR, UAE NATIONAL MEN, WHO ACCOUNT FOR THE VAST MAJORITY OF UAE STUDENTS IN THE US, ARE ENCOUNTERING FEWER DELAYS IN VISA PROCESSING. ALREADY, SEVERAL UAE STUDENTS HAD APPLIED RECENTLY AND WERE ISSUED A VISA THE NEXT DAY. ON THE NSEERS PROCEDURES, THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY IS IMPLEMENTING EXIT CONTROLS AT US POES FOR ALL DEPARTING VISITORS, AND THIS EFFORT SHOULD RESULT IN EASIER PROCESSING FOR UAE STUDENTS.

14. WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING SOME STUDENTS WOULD STILL BE DELAYED, NAJAT AND HER STAFF WERE DELIGHTED TO HEAR THAT MALE UAE STUDENTS WOULD NO LONGER BE AUTOMATICALLY SUBJECT TO A DELAY. SHE NOTED THAT THIS WOULD GO A LONG WAY IN ENCOURAGING UAE STUDENTS TO ONCE AGAIN CHOOSE THE US AS THE PREMIER DESTINATION FOR STUDY. WHILE THIS IS QUITE A POSITIVE ACHEIVEMENT, NAJAT ALSO NOTED THAT THE MOHE STILL MUST STRUGGLE WITH PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE US AS A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT FOR ARABS AND MUSLIMS. HOWEVER, THIS PERCEPTION WILL IMPROVE AS MORE STUDENTS TRAVEL TO, STUDY IN, AND RETURN FROM THE US. SO FAR, ALL MOHE STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE US HAVE HAD NO PROBLEMS OR INCIDENTS, AND THEIR AND OTHERS' EXPERIENCES WILL STEADILY CONVINCE PARENTS TO ALLOW THEIR CHILDREN TO RETURN TO THE US.

15. FINALLY, CONOFF DISCUSSED WITH MOHE OFFICIALS THE CASE OF A SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT HOLDING US AND UAE CITIZENSHIP. AS A US CITIZEN, CONOFF NOTED THAT THE STUDENT MUST TRAVEL TO THE US ON A US PASSPORT AND COULD NOT RECEIVE A VISA IN HIS UAE PASSPORT, DESPITE THE UAEG'S REQUIREMENT THAT STUDENTS RECEIVE A VALID VISA BEFORE THEY RECEIVE FINAL APPROVAL FOR THEIR STUDIES. NAJAT POINTED OUT THAT UAEG LAW PROHIBITS UAE CITIZENS FROM HOLDING DUAL CITIZENSHIP. IN RESPONSE, CONOFF POINTED OUT THAT THIS IS A UAEG POLICY, AND UNFORTUNATELY, THE ONUS FALLS UPON THE MOHE TO ESTABLISH RELIEF FOR THE STUDENT. OTHERWISE, CONSULAR AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF ARE READY AND WILLING TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE THEY CAN FOR THIS AND OTHER UAE STUDENTS.

ALBRIGHT